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## SOCIAL & DOMESTIC ISSUES

# MORE GUNS MEAN LESS CRIME

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In the new edition of *More Guns, Less Crime*, economist John R. Lott, Jr., easily dispels any lingering doubt that allowing citizens to carry concealed handguns is strongly associated with—if not a direct cause for—lowering the rates of violent crime.

“The hypothesis that more guns connects to less crime has stood up against massive efforts to criticize it,” Lott writes in the book’s third edition, now available from the University of Chicago Press in the United States and on June 14 in the United Kingdom. He backs that statement with cold, hard facts.

The new edition, which includes data and analysis from 39 states and now covers 29 years (1977-2005), will make it much more difficult for Lott’s critics and anti-gun groups to continue their attempts to disarm law-abiding Americans. In fact, Lott frequently turns the tables on his critics by demonstrating how their own data actually support the More Guns, Less Crime thesis.

“There are large drops in overall violent crime, murder, rape, and aggravated assault that begin right after the right-to-carry laws have gone into effect,” Lott writes. “In all those crime categories, the crime rates consistently stay much lower than they were before the law.”

From the time states passed right-to-carry concealed handgun laws, the average murder rate dropped from 6.3 per 100,000 to 5.2 per 100,000 nine-to-ten years later—“about a 1.7% drop in the murder rate per year for ten years.”

Overall violent crime rates similarly dropped from 475 crimes per 100,000 people to a range of 415-440 after the second full year that concealed-carry laws were passed. Rapes dropped from 40.2 per 100,000 people to 35.7 per 100,000 nine to 10 years later (a 12% drop).

“Of all the methods studied so far by economists, the carrying of concealed handguns appears to be the most cost-effective method for reducing crime,” Lott wrote in the second edition of his book.

Based on National Institute of Justice figures, Lott estimates in the new edition that the economic loss resulting from a murder in 2007 dollars at \$3.9 million, with the average loss from rape and robbery at \$115,260 and \$10,758 respectively. “If we use these figures [including the costs of aggravated assault and property crimes], the 29 states that we study save over \$30 billion a year, with over half of that coming just from the reduction in murder rates.”

Dozens of academics have published studies that “have either confirmed the beneficial link between gun ownership and crime or at least not found any information that ownership increases crime,” Lott says, adding that “not a single refereed study finds the opposite result.”

Lott demonstrates that not only does the presence of concealed handgun carriers—just more than 2% of American adults—lower rates of violent crime, but where gun bans are imposed, violent crime has consistently risen—in the United States and abroad.

“Great Britain banned handguns in January 1997. But the number of deaths and injuries from gun crime in England and Wales increased an incredible 340% in seven years from 1998 to 2005,” Lott writes, identifying detrimental effects of gun bans in many other countries including India, Jamaica, Germany, Finland, and Greece.

“One big difference between the earlier work on right-to-carry laws and the current discussion on gun bans is that with 39 states passing right-to-carry laws we have had the same experiment over and over again in many different years in many different places,” Lott points out.

Unfortunately, most mainstream media reports do not focus on instances in which armed citizens defend themselves successfully without firing a shot, but instead focus on criminal shootings or shootings in self defense.

A national survey conducted by Lott in 2002 “indicates that about 95% of the time that people use guns defensively, they merely have to brandish a weapon to break off an attack.”

Other survey results “indicate that citizens use guns to stop violent crime about 2.5 million times each year—a large order of magnitude bigger than the reported number of crimes committed with guns.”

However, news organizations typically report the atypical event in which a shooting ends in a fatality, leaving the impression that “some events appear to be much more common than they actually are,” Lott writes.

### **Gun Control Advocates Lack Credibility**

Lott is troubled by the way so many reporters’ uncritically accept opinions of groups that aim to disarm Americans, groups that are dishonest in their presentation of facts.

Lott illustrates how “the Brady Campaign and other gun-control organizations cherry pick a few cases, while omitting important facts, such as whether the permit holder was found to have used justifiable force.”

“Probably most telling,” he writes, “is that the Brady Campaign and the Violence Policy Center keep track of arrests of permit holders, not convictions—ignoring that defensive uses frequently result in

arrests simply because a police officer can't be sure what happened."

Accurate accounts contradict the points the Brady Campaign attempts to make and show that "concealed handguns, in fact, help to protect people from getting killed when attacked."

### **Law-Abiding Citizens**

Lott shows that "concealed handgun permit holders are extremely law-abiding." For example, "Permit holders committed murder at 1/182 of the rate of the general public." And permit revocation rates are typically well below one-half of one percent, with the revocations almost never relating to the use or misuse of a gun.

A National Association of Chiefs of Police mail survey of 22,200 police chiefs and sheriffs found that 92% believed law-abiding citizens should be able to purchase guns for self defense. Furthermore, "support among the rank-and-file police officers and the general population for the right of individuals to carry guns for self-protection is even higher than it is among police chiefs," Lott says.

HUMAN EVENTS reported in December that the number of police officer deaths declined with the rise in concealed handgun permits.

Many lawmakers have heard the message. Lott notes the "surprising fact" that many state legislators now have concealed carry permits. "In South Carolina, 20% of the state legislature had permits [to carry concealed handguns] in 2008. In Tennessee, 25% have permits. Exactly a third of the 24 Virginia state legislators from the area around Norfolk, Va., have permits."

However, Lott points out that reductions in crime rates do not occur evenly in all locations. Clearly other factors exert an influence, such as the extent to which crimes are prosecuted and the liberality of the right-to-carry laws. States that reluctantly allow citizens to carry concealed handguns—requiring high fees, inordinately long training periods or that require frequent renewal of permits—do not experience the same level of crime rate reduction as states that impose fewer restrictions.

Unfortunately, only two states—Alaska and Vermont—impose no restrictions on citizens' rights to carry concealed handguns.

Lott presents the most thorough and credible analysis of the effects of concealed handguns and crime rates. Any serious discussion by the media, legislative bodies and the courts must include a thorough reading of the 2010 edition of *More Guns, Less Crime*. The opinion of anyone who has not read the book but who professes an understanding of the effects of concealed handguns on crime rates should not be taken seriously.

